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# Making it Work! How to Effectively Manage Employees *On the Move*

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# BACKGROUND

- Few studies investigate human resources (HR) practices for managing mobile employees (Connell & Burgess, 2014)
- **Existing studies in HR tend to focus on:**
  - Expatriation (Andresen, Biemann & Pattie, 2012)
  - Employees in multi-national enterprises (MNE's) relocating with family for international assignments (Bozkurt & Mohr, 2011)
- **Gaps:**
  - HR support for other types of mobile workers (e.g., workplace itself is mobile)
  - HR support for families of mobile workers

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

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- To understand the leading and promising policies and practices that organizations use to manage mobile workers and balance concerns regarding employee productivity, family and well-being

# METHODOLOGY

- **Participants**
  - Individuals with responsibility for managing mobile workers in Canadian organizations
- **Recruitment**
  - Canadian HR associations
  - Sector associations
  - Employer lists
  - Contacts of researchers in the project
- **Anonymous online survey (English & French) & interview(s)**

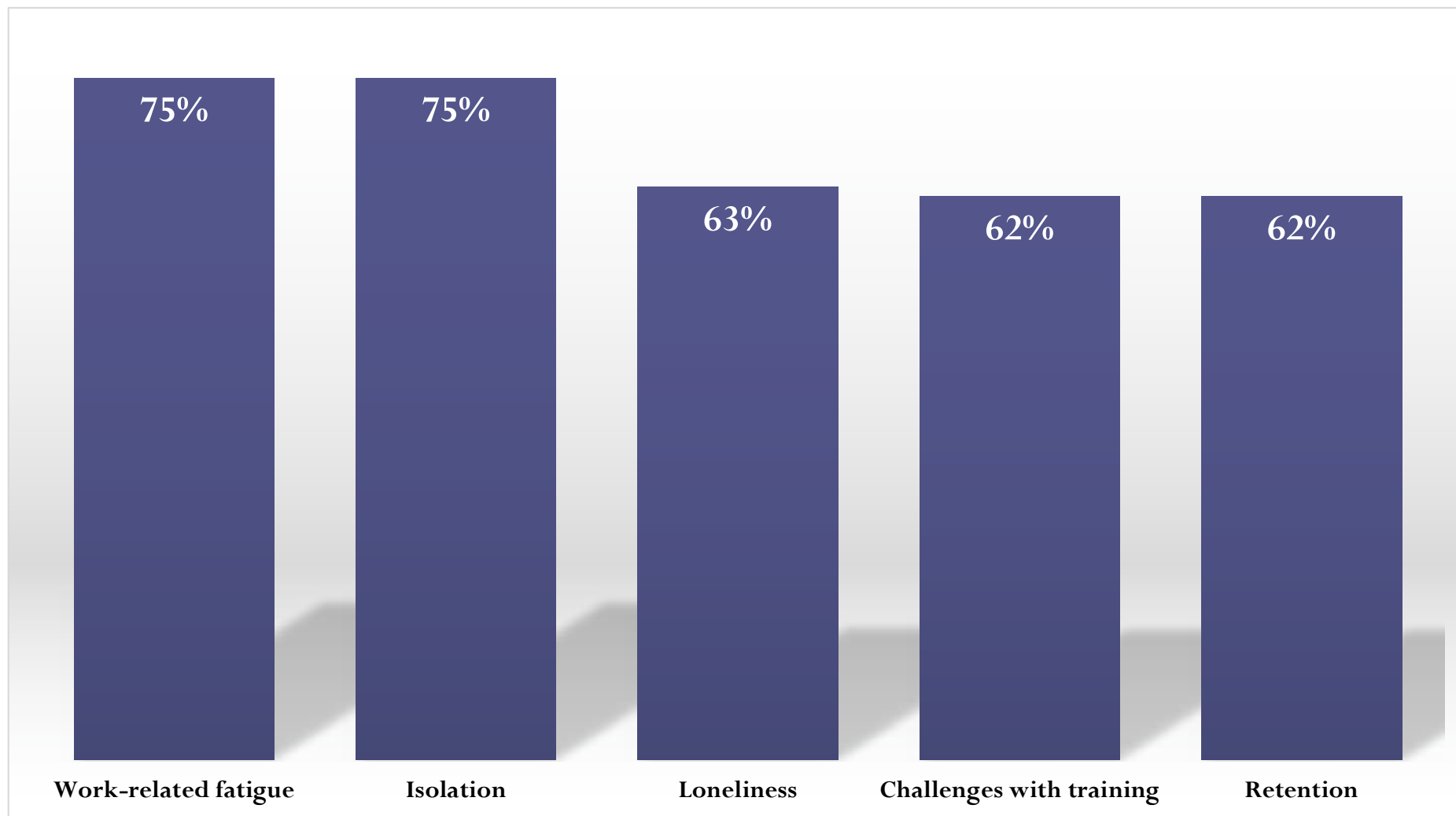
# SURVEY

- Initial survey - 15 organizations
  - Focused on a broad definition of employee mobility
- Revised - 6 organizations
  - Narrowed to Fly In-Fly Out (FIFO)
  - Targeted recruitment to increase the number of respondents; FIFO as a challenging form of mobility for employees and families
- One interview to date

# SAMPLE

- A diverse group of organizations have responded:
  - 77% private sector
  - 36% construction, 23% oil & gas, 9% aerospace, and 1 of a variety of other sectors (e.g., hospitality, power transmission, renewable energy, medical devices)
  - 33% between 1-99 employees; 14% between 100-249; 10% between 250-499; 5% between 500-999 and 38% over 1000
  - Of the 18 organizations that reported the percentage of unionized employees, on average 43% of the workforce was unionized
  - 73% reported having employees who travel from another province in Canada; 68% reported their employees travel from multiple provinces within Canada; 50% travel from outside of Canada
  - 57% reported offices in AB and ON; 43% in MB; 36% in BC and NL; 21% in SK and QC; 7% in NWT (one organization)

# CHALLENGES





# SUPPORTS

- Organizational supports provided for mobile workers:
  - employee assistance plans (100%)
  - communication tools allowing mobile workers to stay connected with their families while away (86%)
  - workplace wellness programs (86%)
  - exercise facilities (71%)
  - healthy foods choices (57%)
  - supports related to consideration of employees' significant responsibilities (e.g. work schedule, location, child or elder care) (43%)
  - autonomy to choose when to take time off (43%)

# FAMILY SUPPORTS

- Supports offered to support mobile workers' family members:
  - emergency family leave (100%)
  - opportunity to be home for special occasions (78%)
  - employee and family assistance plan (73%)
  - short-term schedule flexibility when employees have family members who are ill (67%)
  - communication tools and supports (57%)
  - accommodations for employees with family members dealing with longer-term illness and rotational shiftwork for employees with two or more family members (33%)

# OTHER POINTS

- Challenges:
  - transportation, road conditions, and flight schedules
  - anonymity of the environment in work camps
  - conflict between those permanent residents and those who fly-in and fly-out
- Supports:
  - Create an inclusive and home-like environment for those employees engaged in FIFO
    - Guidelines in terms of things like taking off boots at the front door, wearing proper attire in the dining room
  - Creating opportunities for recreation
    - Buses would take employees into town to interact with community members and take in activities such as golf, eating a meal at a restaurant etc.

# PROJECT CHALLENGES

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- Recruitment:
  - Multiple strategies = small number of participants (HR Associations, Sector associations, targeted employers, contacts of researchers engaged in the larger project)
  - Size of population is unknown - Statistics Canada simply does not collect this data
- There is no one department or role that is responsible for the concerns that arise due to employee mobility

# CONCLUSIONS

- Majority of organizations provide supports that are reactive (e.g., EAPs, communication tools)
- Many concerns are left to employees to navigate
- Fewer employers provide flexibility and autonomy in creating schedules on a long-term basis that work for mobile employees given their family circumstances
- Yet proactive approaches would appear to be the types of accommodations more likely to assist with the challenges of balancing mobile work and family responsibilities

**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**

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